“Did *you* write this”?

“Still. S.T.I.L.L.” “Wrong “ “Still. S.T.E.A.L”. “Correct.”

These are the first two memories that come to mind as I reflect upon the beginning of my literary journey. I wanted to be the best student in class even though I rarely did the work (you know the scene where the fantasy pays out “the award goes to Karin Stratton” ) or I’d be the hero that saves everyone when the bus goes over the side of a cliff. But I never was and I never did. I don’t remember doing homework or studying. Honor Roll was something unattainable and foreign to me it almost seemed magical. I had no idea how they did it. My situation wasn’t that I had no support just other live events were more important .My mother was always reading a book especially Sci-Fi or stories of the supernatural. In sixth grade It was pretty cool when my mom let me read The Exorcist and when I took it to school the kids sitting around me were just as intrigued as I was in scanning for images I didn’t quite understand and seeing words my mother only spoke in anger. However the nuns weren’t too keen on the book and even though the church totally in the storyline I was forbidden to bring to the book to school. Words. Images. The power of words. All opened my mind to a controversial world that words can create.

I didn’t really like to read until I discovered what are now called chapter books. Ahh, the summer of 7th grade. Nancy Drew, the Hardy Boys and a series that my mom read. I think her name was Betty it was written by the same women Carolyn Keene who wrote the Nancy Drew series. But these books of my mom’s were awesome. They were stories of teenagers solving mysteries and discovering boys. There was also Barbie and her Candy Stripped Summer and Barbie becomes a nurse.Great stuff for a young girl coming of age in the seventies. It helped bridge the gap with my mom a bit since she must have understood those feelings too if she had read them . It seemed the more I read the better I wrote. I did win a penmanship award in third grade however spelling had always been my trouble spot. This was all prior to the discovery of dyslexia so I learned how to compensate myself. Considering I am nearsighted and didn’t get glasses until the sixth grade I did pretty well. Pulling my eyelids toward my ears was really effective. I also discovered that I could make a fist and open it just so I could see perfectly clear.

My parents were drowned in hospital debt,cigarettes and burbon so I had to make my own way . Maybe that’s why I don’t find that show Survior very entertaining. Been there done that

In fifth grade I was given a textbook to read and was told by my teacher to give her my opinion as to whether or not it would be a good choice for the class next year. I asked her why I she wanted me to do this and she said that I read so well. That was a first. I never heard that I could anything well. In math when given word problems like those that had the family of four travel to Colorado and we were to figure out the mileage …. I was totally in that car with my fantasy family (it was always a toss up between The Brady’s ,Walton’s or the Ingalls) as we sang songs had treats and no one was mad a at each other. Suddenly the teacher would say hand in your math and I’d quickly jot down the highest number I could think of maybe 134 or something like that.

My first experience in writing my own real story that I can remember was in seventh grade and I wrote a short story about people who had “Blue-itis” It was contagious and the people who were sick had to eat only a few grains of rice because to the people of the town the blue people didn’t deserve to live. Well my teacher handed my paper back to me(remember my fantasy ? Not. My teacher who will be nameless looked me straight in the eye and asked me in front of everyone “ Did you really write this?” It was not at all what I expected her response to be. I explained I did and that my friends even could support me. She kept my paper and I never saw my cursive written story again.

I really wanted to write to create stories that the reader I could hear the voices of the characters. I used commas inappropriately those semicolon things and colon things totally wrong, My teachers were so frustrated by me but I needed to create the right rate of speech so the reader knew exactly when to pause so it sounded like it did in my head. Why couldn’t the rules be used in the way I wanted to to be used? I became a very frustrated young writer.

It’s funny as a little kid I played with toys cars with imaginary heroes in them or my Jane West doll in which I developed exciting adventures that kept me busy for hours. I’d hide them under my bed because for some reason my mom didn’t approve of me playing with my brother’s little matchbox cars and his GI Joes or my Barbie tucked away after the adventure we shared together. I think this was all important as I developed into a person who uses her creativity in the way I do . I love a good story.

Now I have never been smart but I love to hang with smart people. Because I’m sure it will rub off on me in some way. You see if you can’t read the board from the “S” row you look over to see what the kid next you is doing. That way you can keep up with the class and you can get the work done. I learned the ways to spell some really tough words by looking for the little word that the big word contained. Eventually, I noticed that instead of coloring in the open parts of the letters on a worksheet I needed to listen to the instructions and fill in the answers. In sixth grade I attended a new school Catholic Central in New Albany, IN I remained there until eighth grade. I lived in Jeffersonville and integration had just begun so I’m sure that influenced my parents choice now that I look back on it. Lucky for me the grade I was in had that token black family and she and I had the same name She was “Black” Carren and I was “white” Karin. Funny the spelling of our names was really the way to differentiate between us not our race. To this day we have remained friends.

Carren and I were more on the fringe and about average with our grades. We were on the outskirts and loved to observe those around us. I would not be afraid to stand up for what I believed in and what I felt was the right way to treat people. When the refugees from Vietnam arrived to the United States a few families arrived in New Albany and I quickly thought this was a great opportunity to help them and so I volunteered to tutor and became quick friends with Hoi and her brother Thuy then Ha and Nogc who were sisters arrived. Both families were from two different social economic statuses and they really never got along. I made it a goal of mine to get them to become friends and to help these families assimilate into their new culture and to learn all they could. I was so grateful for the chance to know these families.

Ha eventually became prom queen our Senior Year and was in the in crowd. Carren and I were just watching on the outside while working 40 hours a week at Steak and Shake where my goal was to become lead waitress of the night shift. If my friends and I had a class together it was awesome and a terrible distraction, since we had a study hall that was helpful. I had the coolest nun for English class and she had us write in a journal and she never marked my spelling and I found it totally liberating and I really tried in her class. I then took two AP classes and English Composition and Psychology. I scraped by with a C and a C plus. I think what made me take such a class was that it had never been done before and I learned that if I wanted to be a nun I needed a college education. So that is what lead me on the path to higher education. I have always found a way to do the project and get it done however I hate doing that now in my youth I was all about the staying up all night or starting the paper at three but it didn’t work so well and now I hate procrastinating. What I hate more is not procrastinating and having things happen to make me procrastinate.

I kept a journal before my mother died and kept it throughout my college days and when I adopted my daughter I kept one so she will have it for her history. I find writing soothing and I love to do it. What I lack is the basic principles of good writing which is often the deterrent. I hate to sound uneducated and yet I know over the years I have learned so much and read so much and can say I feel more confident about writing. I just need to focus only on the words and stay focused on that task. This is often impossible to do with so many interruptions at school or at home with my family.

I usually try to think about why I am writing the paper when doing this task of writing a major paper. I am often so stressed out I can’t feel the freedom I did early last week in my writing seminar. I think it was the first time I felt creative freedom without the confines of the theatre. I love to create scripts with my students and help them tap into their creative side and express themselves as a storyteller first and an actor second. I hope to get even more confident in my personal writing so I can write the education paper that will save theatre education from the dung heap as it seems it may be headed with so many budget cuts which will lay ahead of us.

I loved the session. I feel the best thing for us teachers is to get together in small groups and share about ourselves and our life experiences especially since we are losing close connections because we rarely do get to step away from our computers and then look at each other’s spirit. I was very helpful to examine the writing I do and to encourage my students to enjoy writing too.